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Ontario

In Brief

August 1999

Ministry of the Environment programs and initiatives

Meeting the challenge of fine particulate matter in Ontario air

The Ministry of the Environment has posted two reports – A Compendium of Current Knowledge on Fine Particulate Matter in Ontario and Strategic Options to Address the Fine Particulate Issue in Ontario – on the Environmental Registry for public information. The ministry is seeking written public input to develop an Ontario Particulate Strategy. The comment period extends to October 8.

Current knowledge

Suspended particulate matter in air has been measured across Ontario since 1970. Inhalable particulate (PM10), particles equal to or smaller than 10 microns in diameter, and respirable particulate (PM2.5), particles equal to or less than 2.5 microns in diameter, can be considered a health hazard. Scientific studies in Canada, the United States, Britain and Europe provide a growing body of evidence that relatively low levels of these particles, within the range experienced regularly across Canada, can contribute to heart and respiratory problems.

Ontario has launched aggressive clean air programs such as Drive Clean, Ontario's Smog Plan and the Smog Patrol to target smog issues caused by particulate matter.

Ontario, like Canada and other governments around the world, is working with concerned groups and individuals to develop strategies to reduce airborne inhalable and respirable particulate levels.

Strategic options

The strategic options report is a framework for developing a strategy to reduce health and environmental effects due to exposure to fine particles in Ontario air. This report, along with the current knowledge document, has had input from the Ontario Smog Plan Steering Committee. These reports have recently been peer reviewed by the Centre for Research in Earth and Space Technology (CRESTech) and the Network for Environmental Risk Assessment and Management (NERAM).

The ministry is seeking public input on reduction measures as part of Ontario's particulate management strategy and input into the provincial position in the Canada Wide Standards process. Comments are invited before October 8.

Related developments:

As an interim measure, Ontario's Smog Plan has challenged all sectors that are a source of fine particle emissions to reduce their emissions by at least 10 per cent before 2015. This is backed up by an interim Ontario air quality criterion of 50 micrograms per cubic metre of air for PM10 measured over 24 hours.

A process to develop Canada Wide Standards is now under way. It will set standards and developing federal/provincial implementation plans.

For further information on what the ministry is doing to protect and improve air quality, just call or write:

Public Information Centre
Ontario Ministry of the Environment
135 St. Clair Avenue West
Toronto, ON
M4V 1P5
416-325-4000 (in Toronto)
1-800-565-4923 (toll-free)
or visit our web site at
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